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HOSPITAL AND TRAINING SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION



IN CHARGE OF

MARY M. RIDDLE, R.N.

PROBLEM OF CARING FOR THE SICK IN A TOWN WITHOUT A HOSPITAL

THE questions raised by the following letter are of such general interest and importance that we are devoting the pages of our department this time to their consideration.

“The Northwest, November, 1912.

“TO THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF NURSING:

“There is a crying need for a small hospital out here and I think I can excite the people to the extent of at least planning one. In fact, it is possible that one of the churches will take up the matter. Now, I want to ask you if you will suggest where I can get ideas and plans for, say a fifteen-bed hospital. What, in your opinion, should the equipment cost? It must not be expensive, something practical. The past three months I have been in this little town and the two doctors have rushed me from one case to another. The last, and my present one, eclampsia, is in a two-room house. All the water one has is in a ten-gallon can, filled p. r. n. by the water wagon, which makes daily trips around town. I have had very little work away from the city, and to me it is almost criminal, the lack of care these country women have during confinement. I have had a typhoid here, a young man who would have gone to a hospital had there been one.

“And it seems to me that a hospital will be a grand education to the people. Many pregnant women out here do not even plan to have a doctor, just a neighbor, and I am publishing right and left that I positively will help nowhere without a physician. I am also preaching the dangers of eclampsia, hemorrhage, mastitis, etc. Should the ‘patient’ be a fine cow or a mare, a veterinary would be called if necessary, but the mother of the family enters upon her period of labor

with perhaps just her husband. Would not a little hospital be a factor for good?

"Should anything definite arise and I be advised with, I should like to be prepared to suggest. Will you help me? PRIVATE NURSE."

It is because of questions such as the above, which are constantly arising, that one is impelled to reply by citing one's own experience or knowledge of similar conditions elsewhere.

Naturally, one's heart goes out to these sturdy families which we know as those furnishing the strength and backbone of our nation, and we can but rejoice in the real charitable instinct animating our correspondent. If we followed our impulses we should fly to her relief, at least with our advice if not with something more substantial. As it is, we are constrained to reply, "Let us look into this pretty carefully and see what is best to be done."

If, after due deliberation and investigation, we find that a hospital is the best thing for these people, then if we can afford it, let us consult an architect and ask him to inspect our site with a view to making our plans for a hospital building to cost whatever is decided upon as within the means of the hospital corporation or committee. If it is decided to construct without the luxury of an architect's assistance, the building committee may be obliged to make its own plans, which ought not to be undertaken without the assistance of a practical woman, who ought not only to assist in drawing plans, but she ought also to watch every step of the construction. The majority of our hospitals furnish conclusive evidence of the fact that seldom do women lend their aid in such matters. If they did there would doubtless be fewer glaring defects in our hospital buildings, which might have here and there an added convenience to lighten and facilitate work, as well as promote the comfort of the patients.

Choice of site is the first duty of hospital builders and upon their faithfulness to this detail must depend much of the success of their institution. It is too much to expect the best results from buildings so located that good drainage, for instance, is impossible. Upon the good site they will, if they are wise, erect a building of simple design and of good material by careful work. Such a building should be able to contain within it correct systems of heating, lighting, plumbing, and ventilation.

The course in Hospital Economics, as it was formerly called, given at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, paid considerable attention to the details of hospital construction for which the students

prepared commendable plans. It is possible our correspondent might obtain information, direction, or advice by making inquiry of the Department of Nursing and Health, as it is now called, at Teachers College. Public libraries furnish such information, and we have read that it may be obtained at the office of the Surgeon-General, United States Army.

But possibly a hospital building is not absolutely required and the need may be met some other way. One must hesitate long enough to be very sure on this point before allowing a group of people to assume responsibilities they may not be able to meet as time goes on. The care of the sick poor in their homes has been met in various ways. Our cities of any considerable size or pretensions do it through visiting or district nursing associations and these people also have access to hospitals, so they cannot enter into our deliberations.

We have heard of a rural nursing service, but as yet little is known of its methods or what it has accomplished. Possibly communities may be able to adopt such plans and solve their own problems with less financial outlay than a hospital would demand.

A medium-sized manufacturing town in one of our Eastern states had long felt the need of a hospital but could not see its way clear to establish and maintain one, so they organized what they called a Friendly Aid Association, whose avowed purpose was provision for the sick poor of their town. They did somewhat more than merely care for the sick as patients. They looked after their general welfare and that of their families by providing suitable household help as well as nursing care. They also maintained a "loan closet" from which might be loaned without charge, or for a small consideration, every kind of utensil used in the sick room from a bed to a drinking tube. Beds there were in variety and bedding also, bed rests and wheel chairs, and cushions and pillows and wearing apparel and so on, down through the long list.

A woman was employed to take charge of the closet and its contents; to loan the articles and ensure their return; to procure such assistance, nursing or household, as was needed by the various families, and to keep in touch with them. She was allowed such clerical and other assistance as she required and was also very materially aided by committees from the association.

It is true that patients were obliged to go to a hospital some twenty or thirty miles distant for major surgery, but otherwise they were treated at home. For years the "Friendly Aid" had the health and general welfare of that community in its keeping and it never wavered in its duty. Specialists from an adjacent city were as willing to enter

those homes as they would have been to go to a hospital for consultation or service. To-day the town has a well-equipped hospital which it appreciates and is able to support.

A hospital is a complicated organization that cannot be made to work automatically and must therefore be *well* if economically equipped and properly officered and manned. There must be constant attention to details in all departments if there is to be success. Hospitals which cannot be supported are too often built, and as a result there may be seen poor work in all departments, even where heroic efforts have been made for better conditions. Let donors of hospitals realize that the buildings are but the beginning of the cost, which frequently mounts up year after year until the hospital property is almost buried from view beneath the debt, or deficit, as it is called. Injustice is almost sure to be done somewhere, with the chances for it to fall first upon the training school for nurses which must be an integral part of the general equipment, because as too often conducted it furnishes all the nursing the hospital can afford.

No one can decry the usefulness of a properly conducted hospital which is commensurate with the needs of the community, and the duty laid upon us who are well, is the saving of those who are ill, whether it be done within the hospital, within the home, or simply beneath the dome of the heavens,—as shall be decreed by conditions as we find them, or as we are able to make them and, as one writer puts it, “We must heal in such a way that we shall hurt none, and we must aid in such a way that we shall degrade none.”

Life is a series of lessons, which must be lived to be understood.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON.